

Vintage Piano Rebuilding Yonkers NY

Headquarters for Vintage Piano Restoration



Victorian Piano

A piano technician with experience and integrity who works within your budget! Although I have recently purchased a Civil War era Victorian and moved to Norwalk CT, I am only an hour from Times Square, so I'm still totally involved and accessible to the Greater New York area.

This website and this business are all about old pianos. I call it the "Victorian Piano" because many of my "patients" have been instruments made, literally, during the reign of Queen Victoria – who died in 1901. It was an era of

wonderful pianistic talents, Ignace Paderewski, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Josef Hofmann, among many, whose endorsements were solicited by the piano manufacturers. However the "golden age" of pianos in the United States was the 1920's, when approximately 8 major manufacturers were slugging it out for supremacy, and West 57th Street in Manhattan, adjacent to Carnegie Hall, was highlighted by piano showrooms. It was an era of wonderful pianistic talents, Ignace Paderewski, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Josef Hofmann, among many, whose endorsements were solicited by the piano manufacturers.

Before the days of TV [and even radio], everybody had a piano, and many less famous makes than those listed above, turned out quite decent pianos for home use. Until 1930, the standard living room piano was a fullsize upright [about 52" tall] with grands for higher end folks. The truth is that even the "no-name" pianos from the 'teens and 20's were often very decent quality instruments.

During the Depression, pianos downsized too, literally becoming smaller. The 6' + parlour grands were replaced by 5 foot baby grands, the big uprights by 40 inch tall spinets and consoles, but many pianos were still handmade, with matched pattern veneer and real spruce soundboards. That's why "pre-WW2" is the catchword for piano restoration.

The piano industry as it existed then has disappeared. This quality cannot be duplicated in a new piano except at the higher end of the market, as the majority of inexpensive pianos are being mass produced in China.

I have been doing restoration on these wonderful older pianos for many years. There is nothing like reconstructing a real ivory keyboard using salvaged pieces, and repairing a spruce soundboard with shims cut from deceased soundboards and putting it all together to get a complete piano with a wonderful resonant sound . I love to feel as if I have saved a piece of history from the dumpster.

About Toni Van Loan



My name is Toni Van Loan, and I have been in the piano business since 1982. I got started in the 1970's when I had the misfortune to graduate from the Manhattan School of Music in the middle of a recession. I had acquired a beat-up Hardman grand from one of my MSM teachers, and I wanted to fix it up so I could really have a decent piano to play. I started out with a course in basic piano tuning at Teacher's College [Columbia U]

taught by a Steinway tuner , and progressed to part-time apprenticeship with a couple of old-line European rebuilders. These gentlemen taught by example rather than intent, but I managed to rebuild the piano successfully.

My association with Steinway came about by accident. I had bought an antique Steinway upright from a deceased bar on Houston St near the Bowery, which I had rebuilt, with new strings and hammers, and then sold to a dear friend in Canada. I needed a letter from Steinway stating that the piano was an official "antique" [over 100 years old] so that my friend would not have to pay duty on it.

Lo and behold, much to my surprise, I was referred to a man I had gone to MSM with, Phil Palette. Other than providing me with the necessary letter, he recruited me to tune Steinways in uptown Manhattan and the Bronx [their previous tuner had been mugged]. Marlene Saltzman, who was head of Repair at that time, used to send me out to do appraisals on old Steinways, and sometimes troubleshoot and even repair current model pianos. This led to my being introduced to quite a few 19th century pianos that were ripe

for restoration, not just Steinways, but other makes as well. These extremely old pianos had their own set of problems. Untunability on account of bad pin blocks and aged piano wire was common, as was unavailability of action parts, but ivory key repair and restoration became one of my most popular jobs. I spent the last decade of the 20th century honing my skills at vintage piano refurbishment. I think of it as a craft in the Medieval craft guild sense.

Basic Piano Repairs



I do the entire range of repairs. On old uprights (regardless of make), the actions always need work. They were put together with hide glue, which fails after 50 years or so, and all the felt is either worn out or compressed, making the sound quality poor. All those little springs which make uprights work wear out too. Many old pianos still have ivory keys. Most people like to try and retain them, so I help by patching keyboards from my used ivory bin. Then there's the string. Regular piano wire has a useful,

tunable, life of 60-80 years. Bass strings usually die earlier; the copper or nickel windings come loose from the core wire, producing either a nasty buzz or a dead tubby sound after 50-60 years.



Casework

I do my own refinishing on many woodgrain pianos, using Zar oilbase stain, and satin polyurethane to create a lovely smooth "open-pore" look. especially uprights. One of my specialties is recreating complex carving that has been damaged by the years and too many sloppy movers.

However, I do subcontract any "ebonized" black lacquer pianos to my excellent refinisher, Chulo, of Chulo's Piano Refinishing, here in Yonkers. [914 378 1438] He also can do a number of intermediate finish upgrades on black pianos that improve their appearance 100% without the major investment of a "closed-pore" black refinish. And, of course, he does woodgrain closed-pore as well, for a totally showroom finish.

For more information please visit

<http://www.victorianpiano.com>